

# Mangoes!

Is there a fruit more desired by Jamaicans than the mango? Think about it!

For about seven or eight months of the year, Jamaicans eagerly anticipate mango season, thinking up all the ways they can acquire as many mangoes as they can. Some even cleverly plan visits to friends and relatives who have mango trees at their homes. On arrival, they carefully utter their greetings, knowing that the slightest slip of the tongue may reveal the real reason they're there:

"Man&hellip; look how little Billy grow since las&rsquo; season&hellip;ahm&hellip;since las&rsquo; year, ah mean&rdquo;.

We travel for miles with the hope that the further away from town we go, the cheaper the mangoes will be and the more we will be able to buy. We find ourselves under the mango tree by the office every day &lsquo;feeling up&rsquo; young mangoes barely larger than guineps, thinking to ourselves that surely they will be ripe by the end of the week (or maybe that&rsquo;s just me!). Quite an obsession this is, indeed! Many varieties of mangoes abound and we all have our favourites. The East Indian, Blackie and Julie, are arguably the three most sought after. There&rsquo;s also the Bombay, which requires skilled knife-handling technique to properly take apart. The Hairy/Stringy type, also known as common mango, is the bastard child of the mango family &ndash; quite abundant but not usually the one you would opt for if you had the choice of others. Oh, and another thing, don&rsquo;t smile after just eating a hairy mango, you&rsquo;ll repulse all nearby! The Hayden mango is a large and colourful variety, and is quite a substantial meal when eaten. Another favourite is the Number 11, with its unmistakable smell. I have no idea where the name, Number 11, came from, but I do recall correcting a friend&rsquo;s pronunciation of the name shortly after inquiring why he said he longed to eat some &lsquo;lumber&rsquo; straight from the tree. The Robin and &lsquo;Sweetie&rsquo; (aka &rsquo;Sweetie-come-brush-mi&rsquo;) mangoes are two varieties I&rsquo;ve often heard mentioned as being the sweetest and there are many others on the list. Like everything else nowadays, mango prices have skyrocketed. I&rsquo;ve heard that in some parts of uptown Kingston you need about \$200 just for a nice-sized East Indian mango. While prices are more moderate in the markets and out of town, if you want a fair amount of quality mangoes, &lsquo;strong&rsquo; money is definitely required. You may be one of the lucky ones with mango trees on your property and thus seldom having the need to buy. Still, you will be faced with the issue of getting the mango from "tree-top" to your mouth. Having faced this problem at many times, I have identified the five main ways to get your hands on mangoes: First, just beg someone to pick the mango for you. You really don&rsquo;t care how they do it; that is really up to them. As long as you get enough mangoes you&rsquo;re fine. What ever mishaps, accidents or injuries are sustained by the picker are of no concern to you. Secondly - Just wait &lsquo;til it drops. If that&rsquo;s the case, I recommend you eat it as soon as possible, otherwise the texture of the fruit will become a messy glob, fit for only making drinks. The third option is the one which requires you having to &lsquo;bus&rsquo; some sweat to get the mango. You will be called upon to master the &lsquo;hook stick&rsquo;. The hook stick is just a long stick, pole, length of steel, old cobweb broom, etc., with a hook (usually fashioned by thick wire) at the end. Maneuvering it requires much skill and experience. If you are alone, then you will be required to hold the hook stick with one hand while trying to catch the mango with the other. All this, while bearing in mind that you don&rsquo;t want a busted mango. Good for you then, that prior resourcefulness has solved this problem. The solution - the hook stick plus an old paint can to catch the mango. So now, the simple wiring of the paint can to the hook stick results in better control over the stick, thereby increasing your chances of a nice unblemished mango. Genius!

The fourth option is to "stone the tree". When I say stone, please understand that this "stone" can, and usually is, anything that you can physically pick up and throw. Thus it may include anything from actual "rock-stones" and young mangoes to the shoes on your feet. The fifth and most dangerous for the inexperienced is climbing the mango tree. Now, if you choose to climb, you have to ensure certain things (and this pretty much goes for any fruit tree). The check-list includes, but is not limited to the following &ndash;

Scan for dangerous insects - Looking out for biting ants starts even before the climb. These will attack, with pleasure, the mango climber as soon as he/she sets hand and foot upon the tree. They are ants and that&rsquo;s what they do! In fact, I have witnessed a few vicious biting ants re-create what seemed to be an outline of Jamaica and some of the Lesser Antilles on the back of a friend&rsquo;s neck after one unsuccessful attempt to scale a tree. Wasps will attack too and will cause a grown boy to cry out for his loved ones from atop the tree. Essential too is a scan for hungry-belly friends on the ground still stoning the mangoes while you are in the tree actively trying to pick them! Do not climb in stormy weather! - I have seen lightning strike just a few metres from a friend high in a mango tree. The look on his face at that moment reminded me of the frantic occupants of a burning building trying to make the hurried decision whether to jump or not. Well, there you have it! If you can manage any of the aforementioned activities, I guarantee that you will have as many mangoes as you can possibly eat, with the consequences of your gluttony being a private matter only between you and God.

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